Koviloor Acadamy

"MY MOTHERLAND" SERIES XE. No. 8

DARIDRANARAYAN

GANDHIAN ECONOMICS 499

ஓம்.

ராமகிருஷ்ண

விவேகானந்தர் சங்கம்

காரைக்குடி

நன்கோடையாளர் .....

ஊர் .....

புத்தக எண்..... பதிவு எண்.....

THE SUNDAY TIMES OFFICE,

G. T., MADRAS.

:: [*Price* 1 *Anna.*

346

Koviloor Acadamy

"MY MOTHERLAND"

This series of Pamphlets is intended to convey to the reader within the briefest possible compass knowledge on subjects of permanent interest. A wide range will be covered, including biographies, new centres of enlightenment in India, health, and economics.

While each pamphlet will be complete in itself, the subject matter will be so arranged as to bind a dozen of these in one volume.

M. S. KAMATH,
Editor & Publisher.

Koviloor Acadamy

ஸ்ரீலகானந்த புத்தகாலய
திங்கு மதராபிமான சங்கம்
காரைக்குடி.

DARIDRANARAYAN

GANDHIAN ECONOMICS

For none of his teachings has Gandhiji been so greatly ridiculed as for his economic views, specially, his hostility to machines. Many wise folk have brushed them aside as nonsense, as the idle fancies of an idealist, who takes no note of the realities!

Yet what do we find to-day? The adoption of the policy which he asked the world to avoid at all costs, has created a situation which confounds the most optimistic advocates of machinery. So vast has been the production of goods through machinery that there is a glut in every article of human requirement and so nastily has labour saving been achived through the aid of machinery, that millions of people have been thrown out of work. Any sensible person can see for himself to-day that machinery leads to suicide. It reduces employment and produces more than is required. So in both ways a crisis is hastened and the world is experiencing its effects to-day.

Gandhiji has pointed out many other defects of machinery. The employees rarely get a chance to keep up their human individuality—not to speak of progress or development. The workers are turned into automatons, dead to all the finer feelings; and where machines have full sway, the outcome is a regular pandemonium, morally and physically.

That is why Gandhiji once expressed that he would not be sorry if Bombay is suddenly devoured by the Arabian Sea. Such has been the havoc of machinery there. The

Koviloor Acadamy

life, which the workmen are forced to lead in the dark slums of that city, defies description. There human inhabitatants are in many respects worse than animals: and their existence serves only one purpose—filling the pockets of a few plutocrats.

Machinery at its Best

The advocate of machinery will perhaps say, that under proper care these deadening effects can be avoided. Where has that happened? Which country is free from them?

From the capitalist standpoint, the most enlightened handling of operatives has been tried by Henry Ford. Not only does he pay high wages but he has built up a system under which the workmen are not congregated in large factories. A good number of them work in their own homes; yet the dehumanising reaction on the operatives is said to be almost identical, though not so marked. They are neither so happy nor so open to finer influences, as, say, the farm workers.

Apart from this, the main objection to machinery holds good even in the case of Henry Ford. There is a glut even in the motor car market and inspite of his world wide organisation, he had to shut up a number of factories, throwing the men into the streets.

So, the machine age is bound to die. It kills itself in the long run. There can be no doubt on that score to any thoughtful person. It is therefore necessary to examine what alternative is open to humanity, how it can be saved from the present calamity.

The economic principles that Gandhiji preaches are free from these dangers. Under his scheme, overproduction is automatically ruled out and all work in the healthliest possible surroundings. There will no more danger of periodic depressions nor will distant international repurcussions be felt by the masses, For instance, a war between France and Germany will at once hit millions of our people now, by reducing the

Koviloor Acadamy

demand for groundnut and cotton ; but under Gandhiji's plan, as India will be self-contained and self-supporting, such disturbances will do them no harm.

Gandhiji's First Thoughts

It is noteworthy that Gandhiji's views on this subject were formed very early in life, at least 25 years ago and they were given to the world for the first time in 1908 in *Hind Swaraj*. Here are a few statements from it :

" It is machinery that has impoverished India...When I read Mr. Dutt's *Economic History of India* (which shows how handicrafts flourished in this country till the last century) I wept. As I think of it again, my heart sickens. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicrafts have all but disappeared."

"Machinery has begun to desolate Europe, Ruination is now knocking at the English gates" (Please note that he wrote these prophetic words in 1908 !)

"Machinery represents a great sin. If the machinery craze grows in this country, it will become an unhappy land. It may be considered a heresey: but I am bonnd to say that it is better for us to send mony to Manchester and to use flmsy Manchester cloth than to multiply mills in India. By reproducing Manchester in India, we shall keep our money at the price of our blood, because our very moral being will be sapped."

Why the Charka

Gandhiji's hostility to machinery is comprehensive. It extends even to the railways and printing presses ; but he realises that his advice will not be fully or immediately accepted. So he advises that those who accept his viewpoint should at once make a start by utilising as little as possible machines or machine made articles ; and if the leaders do so, the populace will adopt their ways, thus steadily starting India on the healthy economic path.

Koviloor Acadamy

In the first few years after his final return to India Gandhiji bestowed his attention on this problem of abolishing machinery and he hit upon the charka as the most efficacious. It is in respect of our clothing that machinery has done the greatest amount of harm to India and he found that by the charka relief can be given to the largest number of pople. At first he was emphasising the need to support only the hand-loom; but when the possibility of the charka was brought to his notice, he decided to devote all his energies to its popularisation.

Here are some of the replies which Gandhiji gave to his earliest critics.

" My views are incredibly simple. India requires nearly 13 yards of cloth per head per year. She produces less than half the amount. India grows all the cotton she needs. India needs to supplement her main occupation, agriculture, with some other employment. Hand spinning is the only such employment for millions. It was the national employment a century ago. It is not true to say that economic pressure and modern machinery destroyed hand spinning and hand weaving. This great industry was destroyed or almost destroyed by extraordinary or immoral means by the East India Company. I consider spinning as an automatic, though partial, solution of the problem of India's grinding poverty. It also constitutes a ready made insurance policy in times of scarcity of rain."

Saviour of Women

Replying to a jesting critic in *Servant of India*, Gandhiji wrote :

" Spinning does protect a woman's virtue, because it enables women, who are to-day working on public roads and are often in danger of having their modesty outraged, to protect themselves and I khow no other occupation that lacs of women can follow save spinning."

Koviloor Acadamy

"The reader may not know that not long ago hundreds of untouchable weavers of Kathiawad, having found their calling gone, became sweepers for the Bombay Municipality. And the life of these men has become so difficult that many lose their children and become moral and physical wrecks. Some are helpless witnesses to the shame of their daughters and even their wives."

Within a year of the starting of this campign, the Behar report on land revenue administration, contained the following official admission:

"The contribution of non-co-operation to the revival of the charka and the weaving industry is noteworthy. The charka gave a further impetus to the weaving trade."

Every sane individual to-day recognises Gandhiji's foresight in popularising the charka. The critics confine themselves mainly to two points: that khadi is too costly and that the income to the spinner is inadequate. The first is mostly hypocritical coming from people who spend far more on their dress and many of them do not even know how the price of Khadi has gradually come down. As to the wages, how many of them are aware of the fact that thousands of women are ready during the off season to break stones the whole day under the hot sun for two annas a day? Is it a hardship that they are enabled to earn the same amount, if not more, at home by the charka? There are literally millions of people who cannot earn even those two annas a day at present. A recent inquiry in Sind proved that for an anna people were ready to work the whole day—but could get no such jobs. Is not charka a saviour to them?

In the Wake of Charka

Let us now examine the full implications of the charka.

Its popularisation is impossible without an organised centre where cotton is received, given for carding, turned into

Koviloor Acadamy

slivers, and supplied to spinners, yarn bought from them and supplied to weavers and cloth sold locally or despatched to some other centre.

First note how many subsidiary agencies are helped—the cotton grower, the carpenter (to make or repair the charka), the carder and the weaver. A spirit of solidarity is naturally created in the village and the worker at the office can use his influence on the people to very good purpose. The village, that is now more or less dead, is thus revived; and it is only an easy step, then, to make it self-contained and prosperous.

From the political standpoint, such organisation is most useful. The rural people realise that the Congress is actively interested in their welfare. That affords the clue to the great Bardoli triumph. Its people realised that as Congressmen were their real benefactors, they stood only to gain by following their advice, however hard the immediate consequences be.

The Hydra-Headed Railways

So far we have dealt with Gandhiji's scheme to neutralise the mischief of only one branch of machinery, the cotton mills. Equally good will be the result in the case of all others.

Take the railways, which we think are so indispensable. They have done immense harm to India. In the first place, they have extended the sphere of exploitation, killed all rural industries and are sweeping away the local produce, not leaving even enough for local consumption. The track covered by the railways are to day distinctly poorer than before their advent. The railways lead to the enrichment of the cities at the cost of the villages and even the smaller towns; and in the final reckoning their effect is decisively harmful to the masses.

Gandhiji's charge against the railways is more comprehensive. They spread disease. They accentuate the evil nature of man. Bad men fulfil their evil designs with greater rapidity. The holy places of India have become unholy. For-

Koviloor Acadamy

merly they were visited only by the holy. Rogues visit them now in larger numbers.

The health of the people has suffered by making locomotive so easy and cheep.

Finally he urges that but for the railways the English could not have such a hold on India as they have.

The Lawyers

And machinery is not the only monster to quit India under Gandhiji's scheme. Two others are to go—they are doctors and lawyers, though it must be noted that Gandhiji is not for their immediate banishment.

" My firm opinion is " he writes, " that lawyers have enslaved India ; they have accentuated Hindu Moslem discussions and have confirmed British authority.

" The lawyers will as a rule advance quarrels instead of suppressing them. Moreover many take up that profession, not in order to help others out of their miseries but to enrich themselves. It is one of the avenues of becoming wealthy and their interests exist in multiplying disputes. Petty pleaders actually manufacture them. Their touts, like so many leeches, suck the blood of the poor people."

Gandhiji's aim in this respect is thus defined :

" Administration of justice should be cheapened. Parties in civil suits must be compelled in the majority of cases to refer their disputes to arbitration, the decision of the panchayats to be final except in cases of corruption and obvious misapplication of law. Multiplicity of intermediate courts should be avoided. Case law should be abolished and the general procedure should be simplified—so as to make it easy for litigants to plead their own case."

So in his Swaraj, Gandhiji leaves little room for lawyers.

Koviloor Acadamy

Are Doctors Useful ?

Doctors are, in Gandhiji's view equally destructive parasites :

" Doctors have almost unhinged us. Sometimes I think that quacks are better than highly qualified doctors. Let us consider the business of a doctor. It is to take care of the body, or properly speaking, not even that. Their business is really to rid the body of diseases that may afflict it. How do these diseases arise ? Surely by our negligence or indulgence. I overeat, I have indigestion. I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine, I am cured, I overeat again, I take his pills again. Had I not taken the pills in the first instance, I would have suffered the punishment deserved by me, and I would not have overeaten again. The doctor intervened and helped me to indulge myself. My body thereby certainly felt more at ease, but my mind became weakened. A continuance of a course of medicine must therefore, result in loss of control over the mind.

"I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are that I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, nature would have done its work, and I would have acquired mastery over myself, would have been freed from vice, and would have become happy.

"Doctors make a show of their knowledge, and charge exorbitant fees. Their preparations, which are intrinsically worth a few pennies, cost shillings. The populace in its credulity and in the hope of ridding itself of some disease, allows itself to be cheated."

There are hard words ; but by no means unfair, Many doctors go even further in fleecing the poor. They advice them to go after imported articles of food or diet which are unnecessary, and often actually harmful.

Koviloor Acadamy

A Charge Answered

Does Gandhiji preach a narrow nationalism? Romain Rolland seemed inclined to take that view; and when it was brought to his notice, Gandhiji replied:

"My definition of Swadeshi is well-known. I must not serve my distant neighbour at the expense of the nearest. It is never vindictive or punitive. It is in no sense narrow. For, I buy from every part of the world what is needed for my growth. I refuse to buy from anybody anything however nice or beautiful if it interferes with my growth or injures those whom nature has made my first care. I buy useful healthy literature from every part of the world. But I will not buy an inch of the finest cotton fabric from England or Japan or any part of the world because it has injured and increasingly injures the millions of the inhabitants of India.

"My nationalism is as broad as my Swadeshi. I want India's rise so that the whole world may benefit, I do not want India to rise on the ruins of other nations. If therefore India was strong and able, India would send out to the world her treasures of art and health giving spices, but will refuse to send out opium or intoxicating liquors, though the traffic may bring much material benefit to India."

"In my opinion, it is impossible for me to be internationalist without being a nationalist. Internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact, *i. e.*, when peoples belonging to different countries have organised themselves and are able to act as one man. It is not nationalism that is the evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness, which is the bane of modern nations which is evil. Each wants to profit at the expense of, and rise on the ruin of the other. Indian nationalism has, I hope, struck a different path. It wants to organise itself or to find full self-expression for the benefit and service of humanity at large. Any way, there is no uncertainty about

Koviloor Acadamy

my partriotism or nationalism. God having cast my lot in the midst of the people of India, I should be untrue to my Maker if I failed to serve them. If I do not know how to serve them I shall never know how to serve humanity. And I cannot possibly go wrong so long as I do not harm other nations in the act of serving my country."

Will Europe Save Itself ?

"What is industrialism but a control of the majority by a small minority ? There is nothing attractive about it ; nor is there anything inevitable in it. If the majority simply wills to say no to the blandishments of the minority, the latter is powerless for mischief.

" Rome, Greece. Babylon, Egypt and many others are a standing testimony in proof of the fact that nations have perished before now because of their misdeeds. What may be hoped for is that Europe. on account of her fine and scientific intellect will realise the obvious and retrace her steps, and from the demoralising industrialism, find a way out. It will not necessarily be a return to the old absolute simplicity. But it will have to be a reorganisation in which village life will predominate and in which brute and material force will be subordinated to the spiritual force."

" I claim that to industralise India in the same sense as Europe is to attempt the impossible. India has stood many a storm . . . . . My faith in her ability to solve the economic problem that faces her millions has never been so bright as it is to-day."

"Machinery has its place. It has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace the necessary human labour. An improved plough is a good thing. But if by some chance one man could plough up, by some mechanical invention of his, the whole of the land of India, and control all the agricultural produce and if the millions had no other occupation, they

Koviloor Acadamy

would starve, and being idle, they would become dunces as many have already become."

"Europe may not realise this vital necessity (that all must labour) at the present moment because it has made of exploitation of non-European races a religion. But it is a false religion that is bound to perish in the near future. The non-European races will not for ever allow themselves to be exploited. I have endeavoured to show a way out which is peaceful, human and therefore noble. It may be rejected. If it is, the alternative is a tug of war, in which each will try to put down the other."

This is exactly what is happening in the West to-day.

Daridranarayan

Be it noted that in all these discussions, Gandhiji's criterion is the good to the masses, to the poorest class of people, who form the bulk of the population. To use his own words, the cities constitute a mere drop in the ocean of Indian humanity. And no economic policy is acceptable to him unless it is beneficial to the masses.

They constitute his god, Daridranarayan, a name that has now become so famous. Indians have worshipped God in so many names; but it was Gandhiji who gave this significant appellation—though it is by no means entirely new to India. The conception that God is present in every assemblage of good people is quite common; but Gandhiji has taken it a step further and urged that He is in the poorest—at any rate, He must be sought in them. If it be accepted, it means a complete reversal of the prevailing economic theories. Any plan must be judged, then, not by what it will bring to any class or group of people but by what good it will do to the poorest in the nation. If the project be harmful to them, it must be abandoned.

In the result, this view tallies with his criticism of machinery. The poor can hardly prosper by it. The setting

Koviloor Acadamy

up of machinery is a costly business and as such it can be undertaken only by capitalists; and for having made that investment, they insist on becoming the controllers and take as large a return for themselves as they can squeeze. Even where the State sets up the machinery, the result is hardly advantageous to the poor. In fact, the very purpose of machinery is to save labour *i.e.*, to reduce employment; and as what the masses need is employment first and foremost, machinery is out of the question if Daridranarayan is the presiding deity.

The Kamadhenu

"We are destroying the matchless living machines *viz.*, our own bodies by leaving them to rust and trying to substitute lifeless machinery for them. It is a law of god that the body must be worked and utilised. We dare not ignore it. The spinning wheel is the auspicious symbol of *Sharir Yajna*—body labour. He who eats his food without offering this sacrifice steals it. By giving up this sacrifice, we became traitors to the country and banged the door in the face of the Goddess of Fortune. The numerous men and women in India whose bodies are mere skeletons bear witness to this.

"Even if the spinning wheel be itself nothing and the virtues that I have attributed to it exist only in my imgination, it will still prove, at least to me, my Kamadhenu, cow of plenty. I think of the poor of India every time that I draw a thread on the wheel. The poor of India, to-day, have lost faith in God, more so in the middle classes or the rich. For a person suffering from the pangs of hunger and desiring nothing but to fill his belly, his belly is his God. To him anyone who gives him bread is his Master. Through him he may even see God....

"And since I believe that where there is pure and active love for the poor, there is God also, I see God in every thread that I draw on the spinning wheel."

Koviloor Acadamy

What of Bolshevism ?

These observations supply the answer to the question: Does Bolshevism work in the interest of the masses? Is it worshipping Daridranarayan in the right spirit?

That the Soviet is more beneficial to the masses than capitalism admits of no doubt; but its acceptance of labour saving machinery dooms it to failure in the industrial field. There is of course no exploitation of the many by the few: but the Soviet takes no note of the greater danger: that machinery leads to economic suicide.

This tragedy can now be easily outlined. Even at present, Russia exports a good quantity of wheat; and its export has increased its enemies. When it takes to exporting finished articles as it hopes to do presently, this hostile opposition will grow and the other countries will make every effect to check its economic development.

Any way, the time is not far distant when the products of the Soviet will be kept out by every large country, with the result that its factories will be in the same position as those of America or Germany. Production will thus have to be cut down; and assuming that the unemployment thus caused will be alleviated by a reduction in working hours rather than by throwing people out of work, the reaction will be felt. Production and income will decrease and the factories will cease to be profitable. As labour saving machinery increases, this glut in the internal market will become more or more severe; and it cannot be met by further reduction of working hours. For, a stage will then be reached when the machinery will be hardly worth maintaining.

There is however the possibility that the Soviet leaders will recognise this danger before it is too late. If they do so, they will be in a far better position to reorganise their econmic life on the lines laid down by Mahatma Gandhi. For whereas

Koviloor Acadamy

in Europe, the owners of machinery will be reluctant to pull it down for the sake of the masses, in Russia they do not hesitate to take any risks if popular interests demand the same.

Whatever the reaction in other lands, India will be very foolish to overlook the present economic situation in the West. We should recognise, in time, that machinery that throws people out of work, is an unmixed evil. The machine should not be allowed in intrude in the sphere of cottage industries and even in other fields, labour saving appliances should be shunned if the Nation's needs can be otherwise met.

If Gandhiji is a safe leader in politics, he is even safer in economics. To disregard his advice is to court disaster.

PRINTED AT THE KESARI PRINTING WORKS, MADRAS.